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ABSTRACT

This paper relies on data collected through the TRUCCS (Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students) Project, a 3-year, longitudinal and comprehensive study of the goals, success, and academic patterns of 5,000 Community College students in urban Los Angeles. Researchers collected qualitative data on issues relating to student success through focus groups and developed a list of 10 distinct behaviors or procedures that may facilitate student success at the community college level: (1) encourage faculty-student interaction; (2) offer affordable education together with multiple forms of financial aid; (3) offer flexibility in course times and offerings to suit student demand; (4) maintain accessible and up-to-date transfer information centers; (5) hire and retain faculty who are experts in their discipline; (6) promote student study skills and academic preparation through on-campus assistance with writing, computer skills, and learning resources; (7) provide sufficient technology and/or computer access for all students; (8) provide campuses in key locations so students can attend classes locally; (9) incorporate work-study programs so students can work and study in one place; and (10) expose students to diverse career paths and employment opportunities through career days, fairs, and career counseling. (RC)

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THE POSITIVE COMMANDMENTS: TEN WAYS THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

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THE POSITIVE COMMANDMENTS: TEN WAYS THE COMMUNITY COLLEGES HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

Introduction

There has been a great deal of criticism leveled at community colleges, including complaints of grade inflation, low transfer and retention rates and accusations regarding the reliance upon unqualified staff to teach basic skills. Much of this criticism comes from faculty and researchers at the major four-year institutions, to whom the community college can seem like the inverse of intellectual rigor and academic integrity. While some of this broad criticism is warranted, much is exaggerated and some is cast without close observation or an intimate understanding of the diverse mission and audience of the country's open-door colleges. However, despite the lack of critics, community colleges are doing many things right in service of their students. This paper relies on data collected through the TRUCCS (Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students) Project. TRUCCS is a three-year, longitudinal and comprehensive study of the goals, success and academic patterns of 5,000 Community College students in urban Los Angeles. TRUCCS researchers collected qualitative data on issues relating to student success through focus groups. With the primary intent to question traditional definitions of achievement and success for urban community college students, the TRUCCS team interviewed administrators, faculty and students at the nine Los Angeles Community College District campuses: Southwest, Pierce, Los Angeles City, Mission, Harbor, East Los Angeles, Los Angeles Valley, West Los Angeles, and Los Angeles Trade Tech. As one of the largest community college district in the United States, the LACCD is home to more than 100,000 students – a total of 8% of the state's overall community college enrollment and 6% of the public undergraduate enrollment in California.

Within this diverse population we found a high proportion of residents living below the poverty level, as well as many non-native speakers of English. Within the students in the TRUCCS study, the modal (or most popular) level of parent education was ninth grade of less. As we met and talked with various people at each campus, certain key themes emerged and remained generally consistent among all of the groups. We have chosen to highlight ten distinct behaviors or procedures that may facilitate student success at the community college level that were found to be common to the multiple campuses within the LACCD. Our goal is not to oversimplify the process of aiding students or promoting their educational advancement, or to advertise ten "quick fixes" that will improve any institution's rate of retention or transfer, but rather to suggest ways that the community college system may be successful in carrying out its primary mission of serving a diverse group of students. A corollary list of ways community colleges hinder student success, or "the negative commandments," forms the subject of a forthcoming, sister paper. One major assumption guides and underlies this research: Community college students need special attention because they inhabit an often misunderstood and unexplored space, somewhere between high school and the four-year university environment (Dougherty, 1994; O'Banion, 1997; Sacks, 1996). When questions of access and diversity are raised one finds the study of community colleges an even more complex challenge. This article and its counterpart on hindrances to success serve as initial explorations and will, hopefully, generate a wider discussion of ways to both appreciate and improve the community college system that is such an integral part of American higher education. Specifically, we hope to address the needs and interests of

urban two-year student populations that may differ from (and yet remain strikingly similar to) those of other districts around the country.

Appended to this report is a brief overview of the ten "commandments" or best practices that appear to facilitate student success at the two-year level. This list of bulleted suggestions can serve as a reference guide for those who have chosen occupations within the community college sphere – as a practitioner, researcher, or policymaker. The external validity of our findings may be questionable insofar as the data reported here is qualitative and specific to an urban environment; however, we are confident that more similarities than differences exist among community college populations and that one key fact remains consistent across campuses: because students want to succeed efforts to encourage and support them will not be wasted. We therefore provide our findings in the form of the Positive Commandments.

Commandment I: Encourage faculty-student interaction; recruit instructors who offer time, attention and resources to facilitate student development; include student interaction in the faculty reward system.

Community colleges have taken a bold step toward redefining the role of college professors to include an emphasis on teacher-student interaction. Some campuses reward faculty for cultivating and maintaining relationships with their students. We found evidence of a connection between faculty perceptions of their efforts to reach out and student acknowledgement and appreciation of these gestures. An instructor at Campus 1[1] notes: "We have very dedicated faculty and a lot of departments work together." A student from Campus 1 supports this claim by explaining that he came to Campus 1

[1] Instead of revealing information specific to a given Campus in Los Angeles, we have chosen to label the Campuses 1-9 in random order to protect the identities of those we interviewed.

because of the, "wonderful instructors and counselors. They help me feel comfortable." Another student adds, "The instructors gave me the right information for my career."

At Campus 2, the trend toward increased faculty-student interaction is further reinforced. Administrators there have developed a document called "The Nurturing College" – a memo sent to all faculty, staff and departments reminding the wider community to promote student success. The document, according to one administrator, is "changing the tone and the philosophy of a lot of people. We have faculty that have been around here for a long time and I think they are getting energized now." The enthusiasm is contagious. Students at Campus 2 perceive that faculty "pay more attention to you" and "some of the teachers encourage you." Another student remarks that she has had a "positive teacher experience," while her peer explains:

> The instructors are great. They encourage students and they are willing to spend time with you. I had no idea what I wanted to do when I came here. My professors encourage me rather than asking me 'what are you doing to do with a Bachelor's degree in English?'

Similar sentiments can be found in transcripts from focus groups at Campus 3, where faculty are described as "friendly and patient," and "willing to put in extra time to help you understand the material." Campuses 4, 5 and 6 also rank high on the list of LACCD colleges whose students claim that faculty "go the extra mile" to help those in need of additional assistance and care.

Campus 7 is especially innovative when it comes to institutionalizing the importance of faculty-student interaction – especially during the critical first two years of student enrollment. A first-year student explains: "There is a program on campus called The Freshman/Sophomore Experience. I am having a lot of trouble in my math classes

and in this program they have excellent teachers in most of the basic skills classes." Another student elaborates: "The Freshman/Sophomore Experience program helps. The program gives you the support that you need and the study skills. I was having trouble with math and the math instructor was great. She really helped me to understand math." While such a program is labor and resource intensive, the value added is clear: students who receive individualized attention from faculty tend to succeed more readily than those who are overlooked or disregarded.

At Campus 8 faculty are recruited and hired with a mind to their concern for students. In the words of one administrator, "Our faculty and staff are just student-oriented. I think we have put a lot of emphasis when we hire people, especially on a permanent basis, on positive disposition and those qualities that we value most and that create the positive campus climate. Here, and in our everyday life, we reinforce that. You can see it at most of our meetings where we encourage it, reward it, and I think we do our greatest good when we do our hiring." Another administrator echoes this view:

> There is a shared, committed vision to student success by our staff entirely, and I mean the classified staff, faculty, administrators. You can walk around the campus and know that staff are committed to help students succeed. I think that's one of the best things about this college.

The value of time spent between a faculty member and a student cannot be overemphasized. Campuses that genuinely prioritize student success encourage and reward faculty who take an interest in student development by giving of their time, energy and academic resources. The good news is that all of the LACCD colleges seem to be moving in the right direction, with explicit efforts to motivate and promote faculty who dedicate themselves to student progress.

Commandment II: Offer affordable education together with multiple forms of financial aid.

The California community colleges offer a terrific deal: $11 per unit of credit alongside generous forms of financial aid. Moreover, for economically disadvantaged students the EOP&S (Educational Opportunity Program and Services) office coordinates financial assistance, such as fee and book waivers, and offers specialized counseling for all majors and degree programs[2]. Students in all of the groups we interviewed seem to appreciate the helping hand. At Campus 1, education is perceived to be "affordable and close to home." The college offers assistance to students "financially with tuition, fee waivers for general education credits and additional financial support such as ... cal grants and EOP&S." Students at all of the other LACCD campuses made similar statements. For example, one student reflects specifically on the difference between her tuition costs and those of other college students she knows: "It's cheaper than a four-year school." Those who plan to transfer feel safe making career decisions – and changes – at the community college level because the financial stakes are not high:

> My mindset about college is that I might change majors. If I went to a private university that would cost a lot of money for my parents. So if I came to a junior college and then changed majors, it wouldn't be a lot of money. It would cost a lot less to do that here.

Beyond low tuition costs and waived fees, students are able to find scholarships at most of the campuses.

The EOP&S program is making a significant difference for students in the LACCD. Most colleges offer book waivers to eligible students through the EOP&S

office (for roughly $250). At Campus 3, one student reveals that EOP&S also pays for monthly bus stickers to eliminate the costs of transportation that might prevent him from attending classes. By making every possible effort to fund students' education and then tracking their progress, the EOP&S program sets an outstanding example of the way college administration can work with students to advance their success. EOP&S offices in California often work in conjunction with CARE, "a California State funded Program designed to recruit and assist single parent recipients of CalWORKs. CARE provides support services and/or grant funds to assist single parents with the development of potential ability through academic support and financial assistance" (http://www.lahc.cc.ca.us/eops/). Together, these programs open doors to students who otherwise might not be able to afford or attend college classes. They help promote equity and diversity, which are keys to success in urban community college districts.

Commandment III: Offer flexibility in course times and offerings by opening sections to suit student demand and convenience. Offer many courses in the evenings/on weekends.

Affordable tuition is not the community college's only silver bullet; flexibility in course offerings and schedules allows students to attend class regularly at times that fit conveniently within their busy work and family schedules. At Campus 1 students remark that they have no difficulty registering for classes, and that there are "so many interesting classes" to take. One Campus 1 faculty member discusses the process of devising a student-friendly class schedule: "We try to work together to facilitate scheduling and to get together with each other to allow these students to take classes that are convenient for

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[2] **EOP&S** is a state funded program designed to recruit and retain educationally and economically disadvantaged students. The program provides services over and above those offered by financial aid,

them." Campus 7 is taking this effort an additional step r to introduce a year-round calendar, in which there are five annual enrollment periods instead of the traditional three (fall, spring, summer). While the rotating enrollment can be stressful for those in administrative positions, with a constant influx of new students to matriculate, the benefits seem to outweigh the costs. Students at Campus 7 like the "flexibility" they find there, especially for those "who have to work. Some families are low-income and they have to work full-time and come to school full-time. [At Campus 7] there are lots of classes to accommodate that."

Campus 8 administrators are also aware of the need to make class times accessible and course offerings varied. One senior administrator explains:

> The thing that I think encourages students to succeed is scheduling of classes where they can go on the weekend or at night or finish a course in a week or in a more compressed schedule. It's more appropriate for the student population that we get.

Campus 2 has followed suit with year-round courses, condensed summer sessions and a shorter schedule that allows for multiple enrollment periods. Students at Campuses 4, 5, 9, and 6 all note, however, that night classes are most convenient for their work schedules. Many community college students hold full-time day jobs while they work toward their degrees or certificates; therefore, it is crucial for the college to be open and active in the evening hours so that employed students have options. Special resources, like the writing center and library, must also be open and available to students in the evening, however, if the opportunities for both day and evening students are to be considered equivalent.

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tutoring, counseling, and other college student service programs (http://www.lahc.cc.ca.us/eops/).

Commandment IV: Maintain transfer centers where students can receive information to allow them to identify four-year schools that offer and/or specialize in the course of study they wish to pursue.

Knowledge is power – and on community college campuses, information must be updated, reliable and most of all accessible. At no time is information more necessary than when a student indicates an interest in transfer to a four-year college or university. Most of the campuses in LACCD have transfer centers and elaborate resources in place to help students make the best decisions about transfer choices. For example, at Campus 7 a new transfer center is under construction and the campus Transfer Alliance, which offers guaranteed admission under specific circumstances to selected schools, is growing. Campus 2 is using their Partnership for Excellence funds[3] to recruit a transfer center director and then, soon after, to create a position for a "retention technician." Campus 2 is also home to a unique program called The Smith[4] Teacher Preparation Program, which "sounded good" to one student. She describes how the program works: "You go to [Smith] first and then to [a four-year state university] to get your teaching credential in four years." Similar kinds of negotiated admission procedures that guarantee acceptance to students who meet certain requirements have proven motivational for those who otherwise might not see themselves as transfer candidates.

While some students, faculty and administrators are modifying their definitions of "success" in the community college context to include alternatives other than transfer, many students still judge the quality of a particular campus by the "opportunity to get

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[3] The Partnership for Excellence program provides funding resources targeted at the five systemwide goals; Transfer, Degrees and Certificates, Successful Course Completion, Workforce Development and Basic Skills Improvement.

accepted at any university." When asked how he will know if he has achieved his goal in life, one student replied, "If I graduate and go on to a four-year college." Another declared her goal to "transfer and get my Bachelors degree." A faculty member at Campus 4 discusses her vision of success:

> Success is when they go off to Berkeley and they come back and all that goes so wonderfully. When they come back and say, 'Oh thank you for teaching me.' One of the students came back almost every year ... you know, she came back to thank all of us – I mean year after year until she finished.

As long as transfer remains one of the primary functions of the community college, all campuses should maintain functional transfer centers with knowledgeable and friendly staff. It appears that the LACCD has already dedicated substantial time, money and space to this end.

Commandment V: Hire and retain faculty who are experts in their discipline.

Institutional quality demands that faculty be trained and experienced in their chosen fields. None of the faculty, student or administrative comments from the TRUCCS focus groups revealed specific concerns about this particular commandment, with the exception of one student at Campus 3, who rightfully boasts, "We have instructors who have taught at four-year colleges and universities. They know what these colleges expect and what to teach. Good teachers – well prepared teachers." To some extent one can assume that student comments about good teaching, which abound in the discussions we had with people from all of the LACCD campuses, demonstrate the qualifications of faculty; however, good teaching is not equivalent to, nor a prerequisite of, expertise – and ideally a community college instructor would have both content

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[4] Name of the program changed due to required campus anonymity.

knowledge and the ability to convey information in a competent manner. One, without the other, is incomplete. Fundamentally, administrators are responsible for hiring and recruiting appropriately trained faculty. They are also responsible for making sure faculty have time and freedom to dedicate themselves fully to the task of teaching, which necessarily involves the cultivation of meaningful relationships with students.

Commandment VI: Promote student study skills and academic preparation through on-campus assistance with writing, computer skills and learning resources. Find innovative ways to introduce students to available services (such as the tutoring center).

For students who come to the community college without cultural capital or academic savvy, resources must be readily available and identifiable in order to appear accessible. Unlike their four-year counterparts who have in many cases visited college campuses and been trained to utilize various kinds of resources, community college students can often feel lost in the shuffle. Campus 1 is pro-active in addressing this potential problem by utilizing the counseling services of EOP&S to assist students with tutoring, degree progress and transfer resources. Explains one student we interviewed, "Help is always available. I'm very impressed with the support offered. The Director of EOP&S is phenomenal." Another student at Campus 1 reiterates this praise: "EOP&S checks up on me and helps me with goal setting and the correct classes to take. It keeps me on track." Faculty at Campus 1 also note that they assist students through counseling, but also by developing courses that transfer, in addition to orientation programs and internet access to student services. As times change and technology develops, the community college has to adapt to shifting student needs.

At Campus 7 we were able to speak with an administrator who reinforced the need to acclimate students to campus culture: "A lot of the basics are described to them and discussed with them as far as the right classes to take, filling out simple forms or writing resumes ... just every aspect of a real college experience." Clearly the needs of students differ, however, based on factors like gender and ethnicity. At Campus 7 there is talk of starting a program to mentor African American male students, for example, and then expanding the same concept to reach Latino students who make up a significant portion of their total population. As another administrator explains, "Their numbers are just too low ... when there's a need I try to respond." All of the LACCD campuses are in one way or another working to meet their students' needs in terms of offering relevant student services. Campus 8 emphasizes career development and retention, while Campus 2 provides study skills tutoring and Campus 3 offers a resource center in addition to a citizenship center for its multi-cultural student body.

Most of the campuses rely heavily on the EOP&S office to reach out and establish contact with at-risk students. Only at Campus 8 did we hear about broad assessment and special testing to determine specific needs. The administration claims this unique, student-based approach comes from "the personality of the campus. We happen to value that. We even have psychological services right now, which it turns out are completely unaffordable to us, but we're doing it anyway." Counseling at most of the campuses is available on a walk-in basis, for students who have questions regarding their goals or transfer requirements of particular universities. From student feedback we learned that all of the nine LACCD campuses offer various kinds of workshops to develop good study habits or promote active learning; yet, students must seek out these resources. The

student who lacks initiative may, unfortunately, miss these opportunities. Still, the colleges are making efforts to promote special programs and the acronym "EOP&S" is now, thankfully, part of the vernacular for most of the community college students with which we spoke.

Commandment VII: Provide sufficient technology and/or computer access for all students. Make electronic resources available at convenient times.

Students who have computer access at home take for granted their ability to type assignments for class without the worry of whether or not a twenty or thirty minute wait to use a campus computer will make them late for work, or result in the loss of their job. However, many community college students face technology difficulties every day. The nine LACCD campuses are working hard to ensure that all students have access to computers on campus. It is clear from student comments during our focus group interviews that computers are available. Some campuses are better than others in terms of offering reasonable hours of operation so that students with full-time jobs and family responsibilities (who tend to enroll more often in evening classes) can still find time to type and print their class assignments.

For example, a student at Campus 6 revealed that his particular computer lab was "helpful" because "it opens up early and closes late. They will print out documents from your disk. The operating hours are 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. If your computer crashes at home, you can go to the lab." Another student we interviewed from Campus 4 discussed the ease of accessing books on CD-ROM, which is not only more cost-effective but innovative in terms of providing universal access to desperately needed resources. Students without book waivers from EOP&S can rely on the computer lab and CD-ROM

reserves to read and prepare for their classes without concern about added expenses. Faculty are also introducing students to technological resources through lab components where they bring groups of students into the computer facilities and teach them to use the equipment. Some faculty, like this instructor at Campus 1, prefer to work with fewer students at a time: "Usually, once a semester, I will take a group separately, either between classes or after my second class, and we go to the computer lab. You take them in, given them an Internet assignment ... They won't go on their own, but I'll take a group of four or five in a couple times a week for a semester and show them how to use the Internet." However students become familiar with the resources, the bottom line is that most campuses are developing their technological resources so that students and faculty can reap the benefits of Internet access and web-based tools to promote active learning and interactive teaching.

Commandment VIII: Provide campuses in key locations so students can attend classes locally and not travel far from home or work.

By definition, community colleges serve their immediate neighborhoods. If we assume, as research proves, that access and proximity are mutually inclusive aspects of retention, then the community colleges in Los Angeles are fulfilling the primary missions of two-year education: bringing education to students where they live (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Many students lack personal means of transportation, and so must remain within a limited radius from home in order to find work or attend classes. During the middle of the twentieth century there was a boom in community college development fueled largely by high birthrates in the 1940s and 1950s as well as the limited amount of space in four-year universities around the country. Today, many community colleges are bursting at

the seams and trying to find new ways to use existing space so that the maximum number of students can find classes at convenient times. Despite the overwhelming predictions of increased enrollment in California community colleges, the nine LACCD campuses are continuing to meet the needs of their students by serving as local, accessible and reasonably priced centers for higher learning.

Most students chose to attend the LACCD campus located closest to their homes. A student at Campus 1 explains, "I enrolled because it was close to home and the campus was small"; her peer in the focus group reiterates the importance of proximity: "Logistically, this college was advantageous because it was easy to get here." Similar sentiments can be found in the transcripts from student interviews at Campus 7: "I don't drive, so my mother drops me off at school on her way to work." In sum, many of the students we talked with cited the college's location as a primary factor in their decision to enroll. With so many campuses located in the city of Los Angeles alone, students have options in terms of which college offers the best program for their major or area of interest; often, this interest in specialization must be balanced with the need to remain fixed in a specific location and not burden family members or friends with the responsibility to transport him/her from home to school or work and back. The four-year universities that offer residential housing for undergraduates have found an answer to this dilemma. For now, community colleges are commuter schools that can only compensate for lack of on-campus housing by offering services to students in many different and convenient locations.

Many of the students we talked with have moved and continue to change residence during their tenure at a particular college. Some chose to remain enrolled at the

original campus where they first matriculated; others have opted to change locations so the problem of commuting does not become insurmountable. At Campus 4 a student moved twenty minutes away from the college where she began study, but chose to stay there because she was familiar with the campus and the people. Another major factor in student retention is the bond developed between instructors and students during and outside of class. This particular student had grown accustomed to the environment at the first campus she attended. As more students find their unique place on campus – a space where they fit in, or an instructor who mentors them – fewer will feel lost and retention rates will likely rise. Campus 4 may be setting an example in terms of finding ways to keep students enrolled and engaged once they arrive, even if they move closer to a different school or encounter difficulty with transportation.

Commandment IX: Incorporate work-study programs so students can work and study in one place, allowing them to take more classes or focus more directly on their degree or certificate progress.

Work study is a federal program that subsidizes student part-time jobs as part of the financial aid package. While not all students qualify for federal work-study, most students find it necessary to work while taking college classes. The LACCD is establishing opportunities for their students to work in various campus offices where they can gain valuable experience and at the same time suffer fewer consequences associated with complex commutes between home, work and school. Often, these students are able to work around the class schedules, so they can take the courses they need to graduate or transfer on time. A student at Campus 7 labeled the on-campus job he found "a great thing" because it enables him to "work at school and it helps me financially." Another

student at Campus 3 enjoys the rare benefit of working in the tutoring lab, so she can receive additional tutoring during her hours of employment while she assists other students to improve their learning, as well.

Administrators comment that particularly in the counseling centers, staff members benefit from the presence of "student helpers" who assist them with scheduling and answering telephones, which allows them to focus more attention on students who need guidance. Campus 8 takes the process of hiring student workers so seriously they have recently developed and implemented a training program to ensure quality service:

> This summer we put together a training manual for the student workers, too, so that they can be better prepared. And the students absolutely loved it. They were so happy that we took the time to give them this extra training with customer service. How to work with different people and also how to become really knowledgeable about our own services so the customer doesn't get sent from one office to the next.

The secret to enhancing services for students is to find a mutually beneficial arrangement so students can learn and develop their own skills while at the same time help to reinforce the goals and mission of the college. Creativity on the part of administrators is inspiring because it demonstrates the desire of college staff to improve conditions for students who want to succeed. By recognizing the need for many students to find employment, and in offering job opportunities on campus, the LACCD campuses are increasing the likelihood that more students will attend classes and make timely progress toward their goals.

Commandment X: Hold career days and fairs, and offer career counseling, to expose students to diverse career paths and employment opportunities.

Some campuses in the LACCD are specifically geared toward vocational preparation, while others are more academically and transfer oriented. However, despite

the differences between them, all campuses we visited shared a common vision for student success. They realized the importance of exposure to a variety of career paths. Often students will see themselves as qualified only for a finite range of jobs or positions based on their family experience or prior training. Job fairs and career counseling are ways the community college can intervene and broaden the horizons of students whose goals are circumscribed by lack of awareness. Interestingly, the current community college population is sprinkled with a subsection of students who seek additional career training for a job they already possess; these students need less career counseling and more course offerings.

At Campus 8 there are a variety of workshops geared toward students who are still deciding on a path to follow. At Campus 2 an administrator found that a number of students began a job, were not satisfied, and so have come to the community college in search of a new and more interesting career. Thus, he is working to transform their vocational education program to provide job training. Campuses 3 and 4 have Career Centers and specific "career days" where students can find information and meet representatives from various fields and different occupational backgrounds. While counseling advice is still seen as central to the process of navigating the community college experience, career counselors focus solely on helping students determine a major course of study or employment trajectory. Some students like to visit career counselors just to find inspiration: "I like it when they talk about where you can go and what you can do. That is what I need to get – more information about jobs." It takes courage and dedication to pursue a college education or change jobs mid-life. For students who have

this initiative and motivation, the LACCD offers a myriad of services designed to help students define success and achieve their goals.

Conclusion

For most who read this paper and its counterpart on hindrances to student success, the data we discuss and focus groups comments we cite will not reveal major surprises or uncover startling revelations. This paper in particular, which focuses uniquely on the positive steps taken by the LACCD to facilitate student progress, generally reinforces common wisdom about community college best practices. While the emphasis on "commandments" may appear didactic, our goal is to make suggestions for ways to improve transfer and retention rates. After conducting this initial round of focus groups and discovering patterns of recurring themes in comments from all of the different campuses, it was our design to construct a template and begin a larger conversation about how one district assists urban students to succeed.

The information we gleaned is evidence of many people's collective efforts to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged and under-prepared students; at the same time, we see proof that the community college system works well for students intending to transfer, those who seek career advancement, as well as those who seek an associates degree or certificate in a vocational trade. We have appended to both the positive and negative commandment articles, a single-sheet handout listing the "commandments"; collectively these twenty bullet points form the skeletal structure of both articles. The handouts are compact, succinct and accessible for those who wish to review or pass along the wisdom we gained from meeting with students, faculty and administrators who live, work and study in the LACCD.

In the end, we believe researchers can benefit from examining the practice of theoretical issues as they play out in real-time scenarios and daily experiences of those we interviewed. The "commandments" will hopefully assist faculty, administrators, and other policymakers to chart the complex cartography of community college education. The lists are prescriptions, rather than proscriptions; they illuminate the path of those who work to make the community college system a viable and beneficial alternative to traditional, four-year models of higher education. The curricular functions of the community college have not changed much over time: academic preparation, transfer, vocational-technical education, continuing education, remedial education, and community development (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). The complexion and preparation of the student population, however, is changing. If we want to serve students in the best, most effective way possible we have to listen to their comments, heed their suggestions and respond to their needs. By giving voice to students, faculty and administrators in these papers we have taken a preliminary but important step toward a better understanding of, and appreciation for, their experience.

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The Positive Commandments
10 Ways the Community Colleges Help Students Succeed

Commandment I: Encourage faculty-student interaction; recruit instructors who offer time, attention and resources to facilitate student development; include student interaction in the faculty reward system.

Commandment II: Offer affordable education together with multiple forms of financial aid.

Commandment III: Offer flexibility in course times and offerings by opening sections to suit student demand and convenience. Offer many courses in the evenings/on weekends.

Commandment IV: Maintain transfer centers where students can receive information to allow them to identify four-year schools that offer and/or specialize in the course of study they wish to pursue.

Commandment V: Hire and retain faculty who are experts in their discipline.

Commandment VI: Promote student study skills and academic preparation through on-campus assistance with writing, computer skills, and learning resources. Find innovative ways to introduce students to available services (such as the tutoring center).

Commandment VII: Provide sufficient technology and/or computer access for all students. Make electronic resources available at convenient times.

Commandment VIII: Provide campuses in key locations so students can attend classes locally and not travel far from home or work.

Commandment IX: Incorporate work-study programs so students can work and study in one place, allowing them to take more classes or focus more directly on their degree or certificate progress.

Commandment X: Expose students to diverse career paths and employment opportunities through career days, fairs, and career counseling.

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